[Folklore of Clockmaking]

[?]

Francis [Donovan?]

Thomaston

Connecticut

(Field Worker) [FOLKLORE?] OF CLOCK MAKING.

Note:-

The home life, the town affairs, the social angles of the town of Thomaston, (named for the famed Seth Thomas), and the domestic economy of the clock workers were a little heavy going for our [80?]-year- old informant, Arthur Botsford.

Mr Botsford lived to close to the machines. He took his work so seriously that he had little time for recreation, and his home was simply a place in which to recover enough energy to last him through another day. At eighty, Botsford's age on retirement, one's mind is not always active enough to embrace everything [diversified fields?]. Botsford's mind retains the mechanics of clock shop work, the way a cam, a die, a spindle, a verge, or an escapement is made....how it functions, the type of metal used in its manufacture, the details. Some people might say that he had wheels in his head. The wheels certainly left an impression on his mind.

We sought the domestic angles from other sources. After all, if Botsford was is not ready to converse easily on his “family affairs”, material furnished by him would be valueless.

From the fifty-odd pensioners gathered on the sunny side of the Town Hall, from the assembly in the Fire House, and from a few of the men still employed at the clock shop, we have gathered little snatches of conversation, little tales of this and that, and their reactions to change in a company town. 15045

Mr Charles Smith,

employee Seth Thomas Clock Co.,

(thirty-seven years service,)

Thomaston, Conn.

The query was, “Are the old days really considered better than the present, and why?”

Charley Smith, Yankee, speaks:-

“There's a lot in it. You have to allow for the fact that most any man thinks the days when he was a young sprig were the best ever, but still there's a lot in it.

“How do you suppose the people got along in times past, here? Think they had an easy time? There wasn't any relief in those days ....of course I'll admit that it wasn't the same kind of a problem as it is now...but still nobody did very much for them. They just pinched and scraped, and got by somehow, without asking for charity.

“I'll tell you one thing, the women in those days were better managers. They knew how to stretch a dollar. They knew how to buy. The butcher and the grocer didn't put anything over on them, and they got the most for their money all along the line.

“They knew how to cook, too. They couldn't always get the best cuts of meat, but if they had to get cheaper cuts, they could cook it so's it tasted just as good. There's ways of cooking, if you know how. Of course, they bought things cheaper, too. Most everybody

bought in bulk, and that's the way they could save. Most of 'em made their own bread; they'd buy flour by the barrel; milk they'd have delivered same as it is now, but some took it by the pail.

“I don't think there was as much milk bought in those days, though, as there is now. They'd feed it only to babies; grown people and older children wouldn't bother with it.

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“Meat could be bought a good deal cheaper. There were several slaughter-houses around; one of them up by the old White Lily Pond off the Torrington Road. The farmers'd bring their cattle and pigs down there and have 'em slaughtered and then they'd go around from house to house selling meat.

“Liquor? Well, there were four or five saloons in town, but they were run pretty carefully. There wasn't any of them what you might call a dive. And I don't think there was as much drinking going on then as there is now. There were always drunkards, of course, same as there is today; but I think there was a bigger percentage of total abstainers than there is today, too.

“Women, for instance, didn't touch it. And they didn't have much use for a man that drank. When you went to one of the old fancy balls at the Opera House, for instance, if you took a snort beforehand you had to go to a lot of trouble to conceal it.

“Some of the boys used to tank up before they went to call for their girls, but they always had to get some 'sen-sen' or some kind of seed they used to sell, to disguise the odor of liquor. And of course if you took any of that stuff, the smell of it on your breath was a dead give-away that you'd been drinking.

“That old Opera House used to be going every night in the week, [pretty?] near, during the winter season. I guess some of them must have told you about the big shows they used to have there.

“And if it wasn'T a show, it would be some kind of a fair. or a ball. The fire department would give them, and the Odd Fellows, and St Thomas' Church, and the Foresters, and the Masons, and the G.A.R.. The Masons used to give one that was always the highlight of the season.

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“I tell you, a Ball used to be something. About a month before the thing was held, you'd see cards around in all the store windows, advertising it. And if you were going to take a lady, you had to ask her just as soon as those posters appeared, because she always had to get a new dress and go to a lot of trouble for the big affair.

“And you had to be slicked up pretty well yourself, too, and put your best foot forward. You'd have to hire a hack, if you were doing the 2 right 1 thing, and you'd have to speak for that a few weeks in advance if you wanted to be sure of getting it.

“When the big night came, you got your bouquet of flowers from the florist, and with your dancing pumps wrapped in a paper parcel in your inside coat pocket, you called on the lady in your hired hack.

“You'd get down to the Opera House just before eight, it wasn't stylish to be late those days; and when you got there, you'd escort your girl as far as the ladies' room; and leave her there, and then you'd join the other lads in the gents room, and put on your dancing pumps. Then you'd go back and wait...you'd always have to wait... while she finished her primping; and when she came out you'd escort her to a seat, and wait for the grand march to be called.

“No, the boys didn't wear evening clothes, but you had to have a white vest. Maybe the whole night, bouquet, and hack and tickets of admission and all, would [cost?] you four or five dollars. Usually, the dance would break up at midnight, because all the lights in town went out then. Sometimes, for the bigger affairs, they'd notify the Power House to keep

the current on until one. [But?] they always had to pay for that extra hour of electricity. [Always?] had a big orchestra. Billy Hanley used to play for a lot of them. He had a ten piece orchestra outfit.

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“Yes, four or five dollars was a lot of money but it was worth it. Nobody got big money. Yet they all raised big families and a lot of them managed to save money and buy their homes. They did without things. Kids didn't have any money to spend. Didn't know what money looked like.

“You got about two dollars a day in the shop. If you went piece work sometimes you could make as high as two-seventy, but at that they began to cut you. But as I said, life was a lot less complicated. Nobody had very ,uch and they never thought they were doing without things they ought to have. It was just accepted as a matter of course.

“If you were flush of a Sunday, you took your best girl out riding in a hired rig. Cost you two-and-a-half for the day, and you were lucky to get one, because they were in big demand. If you wanted a rig for a holiday like Decoration Day, or Labor Day, you had to ask for it three weeks ahead of time.

“There were three livery stables here, and they were going all the time. Some of the young sports around town owned their own horses, but not many. You couldn't do it on shop pay. Everybody walked. They came to work from Reynold's Bridge, and way up on [Penn?] Road, and from over on the East Side, and thought nothing of it. Some of them walked miles every day. When I was working here in the watch shop, I lived over on the East Side, over on Prospect Street. It used to take me twenty minutes to walk home, twenty minutes ot eat my dinner, and twenty minutes to walk back. No time to rest after dinner. We worked ten hours a day, and nine on Saturdays. Afterwards we got Saturday afternoon off. But you always had work. When things got a little slack you went to the boss and told him you were caught up, and he'd say 'Well, make a 5 little stock.' They didn't let anybody go, that is not

the way they do now, and you didn't see the men out of work you do in these days. But nowadays they won't make stock. Don't want to take a chance with it.”

(end of the Charley Smith story.)